(c) The Supreme Court has decreed that mining activity is not permissible in National Parks and Sanctuaries and areas identified as Eco-sensitive/Eco-fragile zones.

(d) As per information made available by Ministry of Environment and Forests, there is no proposal to amend the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

Gold and diamond reserves

1596. SHRI C. PERUMAL: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that, according to the estimates of Geological Survey of India, the country has six lakh crore and 475 million carats of gold and diamond reserves, respectively;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the country imports nearly 800 tonnes of gold every year;

(c) if so, the reasons for non-exploration of such mineral wealth; and

(d) the details of the private companies to whom leases for mining gold and diamond have been given, State-wise?

THE MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI SIS RAM OLA): (a) As per National Mineral Inventory prepared by Indian Bureau of Mines, as on 1.04.2005, the total resources of gold ore (primary) and diamond are estimated at 390.29 million tonnes (with a metal content of 490.81 tonnes) and 4.58 million carats respectively.

(b) Yes, Sir. The import of gold in the last few years has been in the range of 700-800 tonnes per annum.

(c) Apart from the regional exploration for gold and diamond undertaken by Geological Survey of India (GSI), since the year 2000 the Government has been giving prior approvals for grant of reconnaissance permits for regional exploration of gold and diamond to various applicants, including private companies. These may convert into mining leases based on the outcome of the exploration, including detailed prospecting.

(d) As per available information, the Central Government has given prior approval for grant of mining lease for gold in favour of three private companies, *viz.*, M/s Manmohan Industries Private Limited in Jharkhand, M/s Ramgad Minerals and Mining Private Limited in Karnataka and M/s Geo Mysore Services India Private Limited in Andhra Pradesh. As informed by the Indian Bureau of Mines, no mining lease for diamond has been granted to a private sector company.

Coal shortage at NALCO

1597. SHRI RUDRA NARAYAN PANY: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether the National Aluminium Company (NALCO) located in Orissa is facing the crisis of coal at present;

(b) if so, the measure being taken by Government to solve this problem; and

(c) whether there is any permanent scheme to end the crisis of coal in the company for ever?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES (DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY): (a) National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO) faced severe coal crisis from last week of May, 2007 till second week of August, 2007.

(b) On being intimated by the Company about the severe coal shortage, the Ministry of Mines had immediately taken up the matter with Ministry of Coal and the Ministry of Railways. Consequently, Bharat Coking Coal Limited/Indian Railways were advised to supply additional 1.5 rakes per day for 7 weeks (total 75 rakes) besides linkage, as an immediate interim measure which has enabled the Company to tide over the current crisis.

(c) For permanent solution of the problem, it may be essential to increase the coal linkage quantity from the present 4.85 million tonnes per annum to 5.55 million tonnes per annum by Merry Go Round (MGR)/Rail from Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL), Talcher, for which NALCO has submitted the necessary application to the Ministry of Coal.

Allocation of mines to POSCO

1598. SHRI RUDRA NARAYAN PANY: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether POSCO, a foreign capital based company, which is going to set up a factory in Orissa, has been provided iron ore mine on lease;

(b) if so, when the same was provided alongwith the name of the mine allotted to it; and

(c) if not, the reasons for the delay?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES (DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The State Governments are the owners of Minerals and grant Mineral Concessions including Mining Leases and prior approval of the Central Government is required for grant of Mineral Concession for minerals covered in First Schedule of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, which also includes iron ore. The Central Govemment has not so far received any proposal seeking prior approval for grant of Mining Lease in favour of POSCO from the State Government of Orissa.

Policy on allotment of mineral blocks

1599. SHRI SITARAM YECHURY: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state keeping in view of the fact that there is a huge demand for allocation of mineral blocks from private sector industry, Government are considering to come out with a policy, wherein the necessities of PSUs would be taken care of?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES (DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY): Existing provisions of the Mines and Minerals